

DECOLONISING METHODOLOGIES IN MIGRATION RESEARCH: THE APPROACH OF PROJECT DLDL/ድልድል

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DECOLONISING METHODOLOGIES: MY POSITIONALITY AND WORK

What decolonising means or how it should be pursued is understood differently by different individuals, depending on one's geography, history and positionality.

My understanding is informed by my Eastern European positionality and has been experienced primarily at the epistemological level.

I have worked as a practitioner, researcher and activist for the past decade to address epistemological hierarchies and colonial legacies in the representation of non-western societies, especially low- and middle-income societies and tradition-oriented religious societies, within international development and public health.

My work has been based in sub-Saharan Africa and has involved living and working in rural communities in an effort to identify approaches for addressing gender-sensitive issues, including domestic violence, that are religio-culturally sensitive and locally-grounded.

In the past five years or so, I have been committed to working towards decentring western epistemology from knowledge production, co-founding *Decolonial Subversions*, applying a decolonial lens to academic culture and research development practices in higher education, initialising the SOAS Decolonising Research Initiative, and engaging in numerous initiatives for promoting open science.

COLONIALISMS AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL EURO-CENTRISM

I would like to echo Gloria Ladson-Billings' understanding that “[e]pistemology is ultimately linked to worldview.” (2005, 258). Individuals are always ‘epistemologically situated’, which means that their worldview influences their conceptual, theoretical and analytical framework.

Historically, the Western European colonisers projected their worldviews, interests and understandings of humanity onto the ‘other.’ Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o referring to colonialism wrote:

▪ *...its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. (1986, 16).*

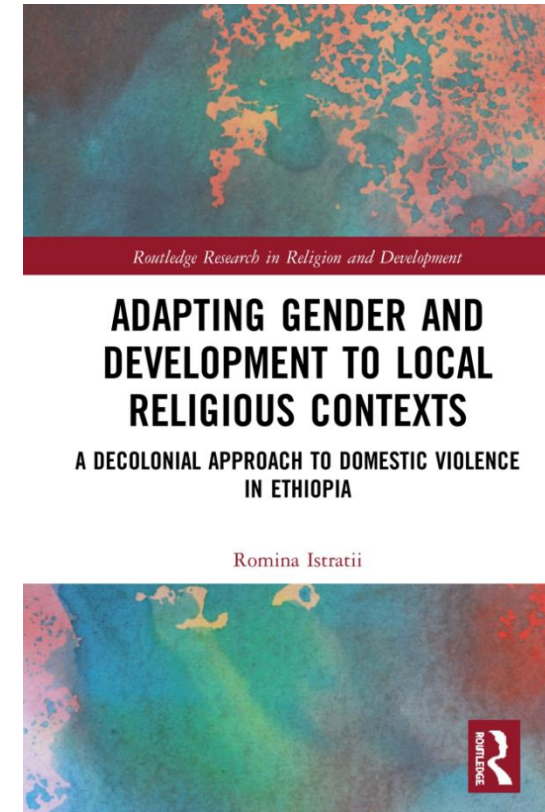
In contemporary times, lack of recognition about the epistemological situatedness of historical paradigms and limited self-reflexivity about personal positionality in research and knowledge production means that western assumptions continue to be transposed cross-culturally and to dictate knowledge paradigms.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON DECOLONISING GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

The study sought to:

- Address the disconnect between gender and development theory and communities' lived experiences;
- Emphasise the importance of linguistic and cosmological translation in understanding local experiences and issues;
- Improve understanding of non-western religious worldviews within western epistemology and research.

Ultimately with the aim of improving the effectiveness of gender-sensitive interventions in religious societies.







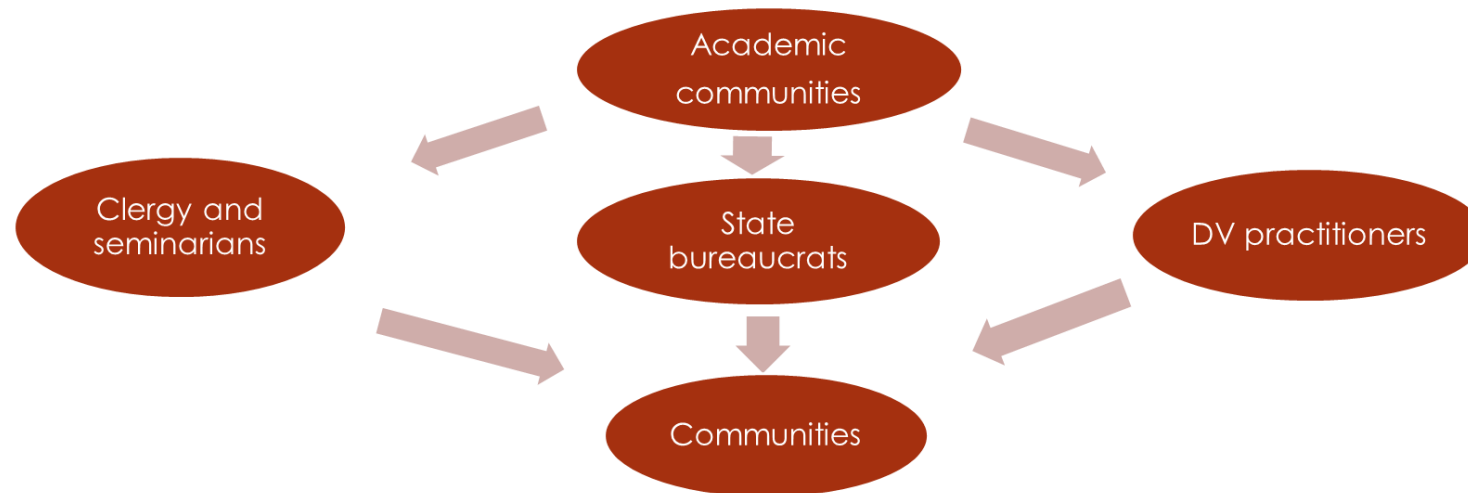
PROJECT DLDL/ድልድል: OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

The project seeks to promote a decolonial approach to addressing domestic violence in religious communities by engaging substantively with the religio-cultural belief systems of the victims/survivors and the perpetrators, and by understanding how these belief systems interface with gender, material and psychological parameters to facilitate or deter domestic violence.

The programme works with Ethiopian and Eritrean collaborators and partners and rural and urban communities to generate new research and implement interventions led by empirical evidence and real-life experiences to ensure their relevance to specific contexts and communities and their integration in existing infrastructures and systems, avoiding duplication.

It aims to apply this knowledge to inform strategies for integrating in domestic violence services and better-supporting affected ethnic minority and migrant populations in the UK.

SERVING AS A BRIDGE ACROSS DISCIPLINES, SECTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS



A DECOLONIAL IMPACT-ORIENTED APPROACH

We depart from historical approaches in gender-sensitive and domestic violence research that have defined or theorised gender relations or domestic violence in western European or other ethnocentric ways.

We also depart from established epistemologies of 'religion' that have been informed by western societies' experience with Western Christianity, theological dogmatism and secularisation processes.

We seek to reverse the knowledge transfer in international development and public health interventions, whereby knowledge, paradigms and standards have been defined in the West and imposed to the rest by fostering Southern-Northern knowledge exchange and genuine collaboration.

We avoid rigidly predefining what impact should look like and aim to prioritise what stakeholders and communities understand as impactful interventions in their respective contexts.

HOW DO WE WORK?

Strategies

1. Working dialogically with partners & employing people-centred methodologies
2. Building on context-specific knowledge & new evidence
3. Connecting with existing DV infrastructure & initiatives
4. Brokering cross-sectoral learning & partnerships through knowledge exchange activities

Outcomes

1. New practice bridging religious studies, development & public health to address DV
2. Bespoke curricula for seminarians & multilingual training platform for clergy & DV providers
3. New multi-stakeholder knowledge exchange platform
4. Pilot programme leveraging religious & spiritual language for perpetrator & victim support

Impact

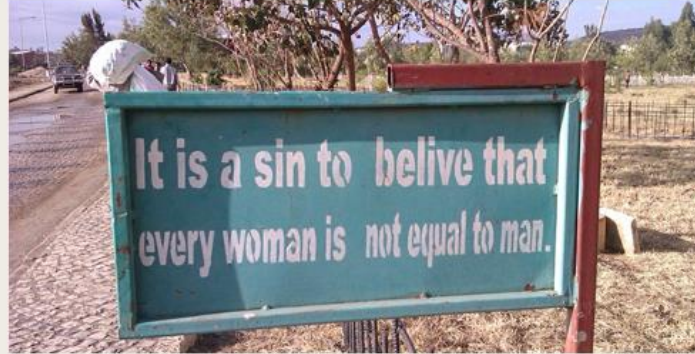
1. Preparedness among clergy & seminarians to respond to DV victims & perpetrators
2. Religio-cultural sensitivity in NGO/state-led DV sectors
3. Integrated DV systems and better served affected populations
4. Reciprocal research partnerships & mutual professional development

RESEARCH



- ❖ Research to understand better how attitudes of domestic violence are informed by religious beliefs and to explore associations with psychological factors (intergenerational violence, trauma, personality disorders, etc.).
- ❖ Research to identify how religious beliefs can serve as a deterrent to becoming abusive or as a coping and healing mechanism for perpetrators and victims/survivors respectively.
- ❖ Research to explore the effectiveness of faith-based interventions internationally and to develop a faith-based perpetrator treatment programme.
- ❖ Research to understand the level of integration of religio-cultural parameters in secular domestic violence sectors and to identify ways to improve integration.

ENGAGEMENT & INTEGRATION



- ❖ Workshops with clergy to provide them with theological, ethnographic and safeguarding training to respond to domestic violence better.
- ❖ Workshops with secular providers (government and non-governmental organisations, social workers, psychologists, etc.) to raise awareness about the complex role of religio-cultural parameters in domestic violence and how to integrate those constructively in their own work.
- ❖ Curriculum development with university and theology instructors to integrate gender issues and domestic violence in education and clergy training and preparation for service.
- ❖ Partnerships with constituent organisations, including religious bodies, government and domestic violence providers to strengthen existing infrastructure

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE



- ❖ Communication of research results to relevant stakeholders through meetings and personal outreach.
- ❖ Publication of working papers and a blog to achieve knowledge exchange and to promote cross-sectoral collaboration.
- ❖ Delivery of regular webinars and international conferences on specialised topics that are targeted at multiple stakeholders to promote more integrated approaches to domestic violence.
- ❖ Production of films to create awareness and improve multi-stakeholder and public understanding of domestic violence and the complex intersections with religious, socio-cultural, psychological and migration-related parameters.

RESEARCHING AND ADDRESSING ISSUES ACROSS BORDERS

Domestic violence is an international phenomenon and migrant communities are often disproportionately affected as a result of additional pressures and dynamics associated with migration and life in the host society.

There is evidence that members of migrant communities will not seek domestic violence services in the host society if they feel that their religious beliefs or cultural norms from home are not understood or considered in service provision.

Studies with religious migrant communities specifically have found that religious understandings and experiences among migrant communities could reflect newly acquired theological influences encountered in the host society and not solely or necessarily beliefs upheld in the home country.

Thus, there is a need to move towards a transboundary way of researching issues affecting migrant communities, analysing and understanding how norms, pressures and conditions at home interface with norms, pressures and conditions in the host society to shape attitudes, human behaviour and service utilisation attitudes.

USING INNOVATIVE, LOCALLY-APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGIES

Research with Eritrean and Ethiopian migrant communities in the UK: employing ethnographic participatory approaches that can allow us to understand the life of the communities and building genuine trust and communication (e.g. attending Sunday liturgies, bible studies and choir practices while researching domestic violence in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo population living in London).

Research with the male population in Amhara region in Ethiopia: employing interactive, visual methods to adapt to the conditions and needs of the local population, with research being led by Ethiopian male researchers with a deep understanding of the specific cultural/ethnic context.

Research with diverse religio-cultural populations in Eritrea: employing a diverse team of researchers from different religio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds who are supported with training to be able to lead research activities and to participate actively in data analysis and the publishing process.

ENSURING CULTURAL-BILINGUAL AWARENESS OF PI AND TEAM MEMBERS

Recognising the limitations of our detached or deeply involved positionalities in the project countries (some of us being foreigners or members of the diaspora community, while some being based in these societies and deeply emboldened in local socio-cultural and political realities) and working to secure the support and collaboration of partners and community organisations to build trust with religious and secular stakeholders.

We place emphasis on diverse specialisations in the project countries and the cultural-bilingual awareness of team members, researchers and practitioners. As the PI of the project, I speak Amharic and Tigrigna, while all other team members and partners are Ethiopians and Eritreans or members of the diaspora Eritrean and Ethiopian community.

As the PI of the project, I am committed to living and working in the project countries during the project's duration and to travelling regularly across project contexts to meet with communities and stakeholders in person and to build an interconnected understanding across borders.